

## The Parliamentary Democracies

The internal makeup of the six largest countries defined them at the end of the nineteenth century. Three of them were parliamentary democracies while the other three were essentially authoritarian, even if two of them had parliamentary systems, because the monarchs determined policies.

### Republican France

France, which had tried republics twice before, established one again after its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. It seemed unlikely that a republic would be formed and, once established, seemed even more unlikely that it would last any length of time. Yet the Third Republic, which had no formal constitution, lasted longer than those that came before it—from 1870 to 1940.

### The Paris Commune

Paris capitulated to the Germans in January 1871, thus ending the Franco-Prussian War. A republic had been declared, spurred by the Republican Leon Gambetta (<http://www.bartleby.com/65/ga/Gambetta.html>), and in February elections took place. These had an odd result, because the monarchists won a majority (400 seats compared to 200 for the republicans and 30 for the Bonapartists). It was clear that the Republic was monarchical and conservative and that the French as a whole preferred a monarchy to a republic. In March, the

provisional president, Adolphe Thiers

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolphe\\_Thiers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolphe_Thiers)), began peace preliminaries with the Germans.

During the same month, however, a revolution broke out in Paris against the government. The revolutionaries set up a radical, anti-clerical Jacobin dictatorship. Modeled on the Jacobin dictatorship of 1792-93 and consisting of a coalition of radicals (Marxists, Blanquists, etc.), it demanded radical social reforms, freedom for all cities, and a continuation of the war against the Germans ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris\\_Commune](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Commune)). It also began a bloody campaign against conservatives and executed many of them. The Thiers government gathered an armed force and marched into Paris, putting down the Commune in May 1871. As bloody as the Commune had been, the repression was bloodier as the French army under General Patrice MacMahon (a future president, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrice\\_MacMahon%2C\\_duc\\_de\\_Magenta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrice_MacMahon%2C_duc_de_Magenta)) used machine guns to kill about 38,000 people.

After the Commune had been put down, a peace was signed with Germany. This peace provided that France had to pay a large indemnity to Germany, but, more importantly, the French had to give up the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, which soured Franco-German relations up to World War I.

Consolidation of the Third Republic



The monarchists controlled the French assembly and wanted a king, but they were split between those who wanted the Bourbons (the heir of Charles X) and those who wanted the Orleans family (Louis Philippe's heir). They came to an agreement that the Bourbon heir would rule first and, after he died, the Orleanist heir. However, the Bourbon heir (the Count of Chambord) turned the deal down, because he wanted the return of the old Bourbon flag (i.e., what he really wanted was absolute power). There was no choice for the monarchists but to await Chambord's death. In the meantime, the Third Republic consolidated itself by a series of laws and crises which established parliamentary responsibility. This happened in the follow manner.

Thiers, seeing that the monarchists could not come to an agreement, came out in favor of a republic. Even though he was a monarchist, he believed that the squabble was hurting France. In 1873, in order to punish Thiers, the monarchist-controlled Assembly passed a law saying that the President could communicate with it only through his minister. This was an important step in weakening the executive, a crucial feature of parliamentary democracies. This law reversed the previous "Rivet" law that had set up a strong presidency.

In 1875, the "Waloon amendment" established a procedure for the election of the President of the Republic. This was the first time that the term "republic" had been mentioned in legislation. The President was to be elected by the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies sitting together (when they did so, they were called, collectively, the National Assembly). Election required an absolute

majority. The French Chamber of Deputies was elected by direct male suffrage, and therefore had more prestige than the Senate, elected by indirect male suffrage.

In 1876 new elections resulted in a republican sweep, with 360 republicans elected. They now had control of the Chamber of Deputies.

In 1877 the long Crisis of 16 May resulted in the triumph of Parliament over the executive branch; the Chamber was also guaranteed a life of at least four years. The Crisis of 16 May resulted from the dissolution of the newly-elected Chamber of Deputies as too liberal by President MacMahon, who had been elected by the previous conservative assembly. New elections, however, returned a liberal Chamber once again. This Chamber now refused to nominate a government or vote a budget, plunging France into crisis until MacMahon resigned. He left the presidency and a republican president was elected. In December 1877, a republican ministry responsible to the Chamber of Deputies was formed.

### Two Phases

The history of the Third French Republic is divided by some historians into two phases. The first, from 1870 to 1905 is considered generally successful in that old problems plaguing France during the previous century were resolved or at least became less pressing.



The issue of whether France should be a monarchy or a republic was resolved in favor of a republic; the problem of parliamentarianism, i.e., whether France would have a government responsible to the king or to parliament was resolved in favor of a parliamentary system; the issue of the interference of the army in politics was resolved in favor of civilian control (although problems remained). Very important here was the Boulanger affair, in which a general threatened to overthrow the Republic and undertake a war of revenge against Germany, which ended in failure

(<http://www.templehistory.dna.ie/EuropeanC/france.htm>). This case should be seen in conjunction with the Dreyfus affair

(<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/Dreyfus.html>).

Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish officer wrongly accused of treason in favor of the Germans. This long affair split French society, being especially important in the struggle between the Catholic Church and the Republic. The affair ended when Dreyfus's innocence became clear and the Republic cleared out the monarchists in the army and established separation of Church and State in 1905, thus resolving another important dispute that had roiled French politics.

The second phase of the Third Republic, 1905-1940 was less successful, with France proving unable to integrate the proletariat that emerged from its growing industrialization.



The Third Republic was socially conservative, not interested in making room for the proletariat, and nationalistic. The emphasis was on the petit bourgeoisie, which concentrated on building a large empire.

### Victorian England

Although Britain during this period appeared rich and powerful, heading the largest empire in the world, its decline in relative terms had begun.

Britain was ceasing to dominate the world economy as industrialization took hold elsewhere. Britain had allowed its agricultural base to dwindle, but could not retain its unchallenged industrial status. Britain also became involved in the power struggle and competitive annexation of colonial territories, so that by the end of the century it found itself caught between its traditional “splendid” isolation and the alliances that determined its twentieth century foreign policy.

### Domestic Policy

In domestic affairs, the decline in agriculture coincided with a decline in the authority of the great families and the landed interests, with the financiers and great industrial companies stepping into their place.

In addition, there was a new stirring among the workers. Between 1873 and 1896 there was a decline of trade, falling prices, and increasing unemployment. In 1889, a dock strike marked a new militancy among the workers. This movement eventually gave rise to the Labour Party, which



contested the field with the traditional Conservative and Liberal parties and eventually would replace the Liberal Party.

In 1874, Disraeli (Conservative) came to power as the reform movement (which I described earlier) and directed by the Liberals ran out of steam. In 1875, the Public Health Act codified and systematized health regulations which had been introduced piecemeal in certain areas. This and other provisions empowered the state to improve health conditions. In the same year, unions were given the right to strike.

Later laws extended and consolidated factory legislation, raised the minimum age for part time factory workers to eleven, established the principle of workman's compensation, and made elementary education compulsory and free. In 1884, the franchise was further extended.

### Growing Problems

Generally speaking, however, after 1880 (when Disraeli was defeated), the attention of governments was turned elsewhere.

A major problem was Ireland. Because of electoral need and perhaps conviction, Gladstone and the Liberals tried to pass Home Rule bills for Ireland, but these failed. In the process, the Liberal Party was greatly weakened.

### The Boer War

(<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8141/boerwar.html>) and its presentation, including concentration camps, gave a great blow to the British at



the end of the century, despite their eventual victory. The disappointments of the war brought an end to the period of imperialist sentiment as a major force in British politics.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, Britain had important problems despite its apparent stability. Parliament was supreme, but the House of Lords still wielded too much power. Its unchallenged supremacy in industry had ended, despite its strength. Its large empire had problems. Despite its effort to meet the issues of the workers, a new party (the Labour Party) was taking shape which would challenge the establishment.

#### Troubled Italy: Problems of Post Unification

Italy after unification faced many problems. The wars of unification had been expensive and, in addition, the new state had to assume the debts of the old states that it had incorporated. As a result, 47% of the tax receipts went to service the debt.

Post-unification governments tried to close the gap by raising taxes. Italy was a poor, agricultural country with taxes based on an indirect system. The government imposed a tax known as the “macinato,” which taxed the grinding of grains that were used to make bread. As a result, the new tax hit the poor and elevated the price of bread, and was roundly hated. The poor economic conditions in the country produced a number of revolts, particularly in the South, the poorest area of the country and one in which the Bourbons stirred revolt in an



attempt to get their throne back. Conditions there led to what was called “brigandism,” a movement the government put down harshly. In 1887, conditions worsened as the country got embroiled in a “tariff war” with France that lasted for ten years. The Italians precipitated this “war” when they instituted a high protective tariff designed to help industrialize the country by keeping foreign industrial products out. France retaliated against Italian agricultural products, which were Italy’s only exports. A wave of emigration from southern Italy that was the largest of the period began.

These problems coincided with another intractable issue, the struggle between Church and State. The Church was very upset because the new state had annexed the Papal State during the unification movement. In addition, in 1866-67, Church lands in Italy not used for religious purposes were confiscated and a 30% tax was imposed on the rest. The Church responded with the “non expedit” policy, which prohibited Catholics from taking part in national politics. In 1870, in order to placate other Catholic countries and the Pope, Italy passed the law of guarantees. This law offered to pay the Pope for the land he had lost during unification and gave him other privileges that practically provided immunity from Italian laws. Pius IX, however, refused to accept this law because it was passed by an Italian legislature and, consequently, could be repealed by Italy. Between 1870 and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Church and State fought each other.



The non expedit exacerbated another problem. Italy had a very high illiteracy rate, reaching 90% in some areas. Italian voting laws required literacy in order to vote (men only). This requirement excluded most men from voting. The non expedit added to the voting problems by prohibiting Catholics from participating in national elections. The small electorate gave rise to many abuses—including electoral fraud because it was easy to change a few votes which made a difference in many electoral districts. This meant that the government could ally with groups that used illegal methods to change these votes, including the Mafia in Sicily and criminal organizations elsewhere. Where corruption was not used, only an elite could vote and be elected to office and controlled the state. These limitations frequently produced corruption scandals, such as the bank scandals of 1893. These scandals combined with poor banking practices led to the collapse of the Italian banking system, the loss of funds by depositors, the resignation of Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti, and to a slow recovery.

### Politics: Radical and Liberal

Despite these problems, Italy maintained a functioning if precarious parliamentary system. Cavour died in 1861, but his party (the Right) retained control of the government until 1876. In that year, former followers of Mazzini (the Left) took over. A number of reforms were passed and the macinato tax was repealed. These had the support of both parties. By the late 1880s, the



differences between Right and Left were so minimal that cabinets consisting of members of both parties joined them together. Many Italian intellectuals—angry that unification had not produced greatness—denounced this as “transformism,” i.e., the selling out of political principles, and harsh criticism of parliament.

Nevertheless, the poor state of Italian affairs produced radical movements, especially on the left. The first movement to gain control of that part of the spectrum was Anarchism. The Italian Anarchists believed in violence and wished to overthrow the government. They tried to spark several revolutions, all failures followed by government repression. In 1892 a socialist party was established which was more open to gradualism, but the government tried to suppress it.

These events and the extreme poverty led to unrest for the rest of the century. In 1893, Socialist-oriented revolutions took place in Sicily which were ruthlessly repressed. A political battle followed that became embroiled with an Italian attempt at imperialism in Ethiopia. This attempt ended with the battle of Adowa in 1896, in which an Italian expeditionary force was defeated. Unrest followed this defeat, preventing the government from sending more troops. In 1897, conservatives attacked the constitution for being too liberal and allowing the parliament to evolve in a way unforeseen when it was drafted. In May 1898, a series of riots broke out all over the country because of a rise in the price of bread—already high because of taxes and exacerbated by the Spanish-American War that raised shipping rates. After the riots were repressed, the fight shifted to the Chamber of Deputies, where the government tried to change the



rules for passing legislation. It got repressive legislation through, but the Court of Cassation struck it down.

In 1900, King Humbert I was assassinated by an Anarchist. Observers expected a new wave of repression to follow. However, following dissolution of a labor organization a general strike broke out. By 1901, the conservatives had been defeated in parliament, a new election had failed to sanction repression, and a new, liberal government came to power.

The Italian political system thus survived the end-of-century crisis and entered the new century under the direction of Giovanni Giolitti, a liberal statesman.